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## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 135 Balancing Homesteading, Family & Beekeeping with Kristina Urquhart

**Show Notes are at: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/135](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/135)**

- Kristina:** When it comes to food, it's really important to not just read labels but almost be a bit of a detective because there's so much adulteration that is happening to American foods that we really can't be too careful. This was an important thing that we wanted to take into our own hands.
- Theresa:** This is the "Living Homegrown" podcast, episode 135.
- Announcer:** Welcome to the "Living Homegrown" podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, national PBS TV producer and canning expert, Theresa Loe.
- Theresa:** Hey there, everybody. Welcome to the podcast. I'm your host Theresa Loe and this podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm and that means preserving the harvest, small space food growing, raising backyard critters and just taking small steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. All the different ways that we can live closer to our food, even if we have little or no garden space at all. If you'd like to learn more about any of these topics, including my online courses or my Living Homegrown membership, just visit my website, [LivingHomegrown.com](http://LivingHomegrown.com).

On today's episode, we kind of pull back the curtain into what it truly means to be a homesteader. I've had several of you write to me and say you really enjoy when I bring on someone who is homesteading or doing something that you want to learn how to do or dive into so I've been trying to do more of that on the show. I had Shaye Elliott on an earlier episode and on this episode I'm bringing on Kristina Mercedes Urquhart and she and her husband and two young daughters live in Asheville, North Carolina and I brought her on. It's kind of interesting how I stumbled upon her. I discovered her while researching something on the internet and she was so knowledgeable on so many different aspects of homesteading and when I realized that she was raising two young daughters and really living fully the homesteading life, I wanted to bring her on to be on the show.

What we talk about in this particular episode is we talk about balancing family life with homesteading life, really the ups and downs of producing a lot of your own food on your own property. We talk about that and we talk about teaching kids where their food comes from, how she raises some of her meat rabbits and we dive really fully into beekeeping and talk a lot about if you wanted to start beekeeping, what is really involved and where you should start. What books should you read and what you should do if you're even interested in becoming a beekeeper yourself. I know you're going to really enjoy this interview and get a lot of insights so let me tell you first about Kristina.

Kristina Mercedes Urquhart is the author of "Suburban Chicken: The Guide to Keeping Healthy Thriving Chickens in Your Backyard". She's also the beekeeping columnist for HobbyFarm.com and a columnist and a regular writer for "Chickens Magazine". Kristina writes for "Taproot Magazine" and has blogged for Whole Home News. She supplies hand drawn illustrations for some of her columns and chalkboard drawings that were in a recent book called "Crackers and Dips: More Than 50 Handmade Snacks". Kristina is the buzz behind the growing beekeeping Facebook group The Humble Honeybee and after receiving her masters degree in art therapy from New York University, she moved to the mountains of Western North Carolina with her husband, intent on living closer to the land. With their two young children, Kristina grows food and raises animals on their six-acre mountain homestead. Okay.

Now before we dive into the interview, I just want to tell you that today's podcast episode is brought to you my Living Homegrown Institute. I truly believe that living an organic farm fresh life style is really a journey in learning and as we learn these different skills, such as food fermentation and food growing and even critter keeping, there are three distinct stages of growth. We all start out with curiosity, right? We want to learn about these new skills but then we move into experimentation and eventually we grow into mastery of these skills.

If you're working at creating a farm fresh lifestyle yourself and you're curious where you fall on that scale, I've got a free resource for you. It's my farm fresh success path and it's really what I use inside my learning institute with my students and it'll help you decide where you are on your own journey. It'll tell you the characteristics of that particular stage and it will give you some action steps that you can take to reach the next level. To get to the success path PDF, you just go to [LivingHomegrown.com/Path](http://LivingHomegrown.com/Path) and you can download it there for free. All right.

Let's start our interview with Kristina Urquhart, the author of "Suburban Chicken". Hey, Kristina. Thanks for coming on the show.

Kristina: Hi, Theresa. Thank you for having me.

Theresa: Yeah, I actually found you researching the internet so this is kind of a fun interview. I was researching an episode of this podcast and it was something to do with homesteading, I forget, but your name kept coming up as the author of several of the articles that I was reading and I was going to different websites and I was like, "There's this Kristina girl again," so I finally ended up reaching out to you and we were able to schedule this so I'm really excited to have you here. Thanks for-

Kristina: Wonderful. I'm happy to be here. Thank you.

Theresa: Oh, sure. Obviously I know you're a prolific writer because I saw you everywhere on writing-

Kristina: [inaudible 00:05:55].

Theresa: Yeah, you were writing about all things homesteading so why don't we start with you talking about how you really got involved in writing about homesteading?

Kristina: This is a funny story and I'm all about being very open and transparent about the financial impact of homesteading and the monetary costs. My husband and I moved to the Asheville, North Carolina area from New York City, from Brooklyn specifically, and we struggled at first to get our financial footholds in a town that is primarily run by tourism. We were struggling for a while and I was unemployed and I didn't know what to do with myself and we knew part of the dream was to keep chickens and have a big garden and homestead. Chickens were the first on the list of many, of course, on the dream list and I came across a magazine called "Chickens Magazine" and it was the premier issue in got very excited about it and I thought, "I could do this." I had a masters degree in art therapy which, of course, has nothing to do with chickens but I could write. I had gotten that far in life.

I actually just cold called the editor, my editor the this day. He's fantastic and he took a chance on me and I sent him an article. Not only did he like it but he asked for a column and it was fantastic. It was a really serendipitous, fortuitous moment for us as a couple, as a small family, and I've been writing for that company ever since.

Theresa: When you started writing, were you already homesteading or were you just getting started in homesteading?

- Kristina: That's a good question. We were already homesteading. We had a garden and chickens and we had just gotten our first chicks. I'm a 100% full and complete autodidact. I teach myself everything. I research to the nines and so I had taught myself about keeping chickens and I read books and I did reach out to some chicken clubs locally in the area and speak to other chicken keeps. We were fully 100% elbow-deep in chicken scratch at that point.
- Theresa: Okay. Now you write for several places. What are some of the other places that you're writing?
- Kristina: I do. I write for "Taproot Magazine". I have blogged for Whole Home News and I write for "Hobby Farm Magazine" as well as HobbyFarm.com, their website, and I have a beekeeping column with Hobby Farm.
- Theresa: All right. Right. Now you are in Asheville, North Carolina.
- Kristina: We are. We're in a small town just north of Asheville.
- Theresa: How many acres do you currently have?
- Kristina: We are on about six acres and it is on the top of a mountain and there's a cleared area where our homestead is and then we have a lot of wooded property as well.
- Theresa: Okay. Now that you have this property and you've been homesteading there for a while, tell me about what kind of animals you have, what your garden is like. Tell me what your homestead is like now.
- Kristina: Sure. At the moment, we have two small flocks of chickens, each with their own rooster, some that we have had and hatched. We have just a handful of our few original chicks, as a matter of fact, that are nearing on 10 years old and we have a small flock that we've inherited from friends and we are in the process of combining them and starting a small breeding program. We have quite a large garden that we work with seasonally and so that means we're growing what we can in the spring, summer and fall in our rather temperate climate. Our goal for this spring is to get a greenhouse so that we can extend our growing season a little bit more.

The town where we live is a really small farming community and so there are a lot of really wonderful farms that are either growing vegetables or are raising animals for meat and eggs and dairy. It's quite plentiful in the little valley where we live but we also want to hone our own skills at the same time. It's a bit of a balance between supporting the local community and the local farmers but also having some of that in our own backyard to show our children and to have some autonomy over it as well.

Theresa: Right. You're trying to make sure that what you are putting your effort in is maybe something that you couldn't find at one of your local farmers markets or something like that.

Kristina: Exactly. Yeah. For instance, we have a small orchard which has two dwarf apple trees and a couple of peach trees and the peach trees are the only ones that we know of in our town. No one else is really growing peaches because it's a little bit too cold. It's too high elevation where we live but the mountain side where we are, instead of the frost settling on our fruit trees, it sort of rolls off the mountain instead and settles in the valley below so in the valley below where the farms are successfully growing their greens and their root vegetables, they're sometimes getting hit by a frost that misses us so we're actually able to grow peaches in a little microclimate up here on our mountain.

Theresa: That's really nice. Perfect.

Kristina: Yeah, it's special.

Theresa: Yeah. You have chickens. Don't you also have meat rabbits?

Kristina: Yes. We have a trio of meat rabbits. They're New Zealand whites which are, for anyone who's not familiar with meat rabbits, they are the white rabbits that magicians pull out of their hats because this is a very docile breed. They're very easy to hold and tame. They're easy for children to handle. They're very gentle and they're large rabbits, too, so they produce a larger amount of meat and their white pelts are actually wonderful for dyeing and using the fur afterwards, that way you can use more of the rabbit once it's processed.

Theresa: Yeah, so nothing goes to waste.

Kristina: Exactly.

Theresa: Yeah. I know that you also mentioned that you have chickens and a lot of my listeners have really small backyards or maybe even live in the city like I do. I live in Los Angeles but we homestead on one tenth of an acre and we have three backyard chickens that are the perfect amount for our family but when you are talking to someone who is just considering homesteading, I noticed in your book that you thought that chickens can kind of be the gateway drug to getting into homesteading. Do you still recommend chickens as the first animal that people should start with?

Kristina: I do. For homesteading, I think chickens are a wonderful gateway livestock to get into more sustainable food sources and having that accessibility in your backyard, especially for urbanites. As I may not have mentioned but when my husband and I moved from Brooklyn to North Carolina, I learned that New York City had never overturned its ordinance to keep chickens and so you can keep chickens anywhere in any of the boroughs in New York City and have always been able to do so. It's something that's accessible to everybody.

I think with chickens, the important thing to remember is that while they are incredibly easy, they have a few specific needs and once those needs are met, they're really easy to manage and hands-off but it's just knowing the particulars about what their preferences are, what they need, what their behaviors are and chickens are fowl, after all. They're birds and so a lot of us, we keep cats and dogs as pets. We're used to mammals and we're used to reading the energy or the movement of mammals a lot more instinctively than with chickens and so keeping chickens just takes a little bit more education to get ... unless you've grown up with them, they take a little bit more education and reading up on before you get started.

Theresa: Yes. I agree with you 100% and there's a lot of times people just need to make sure that they're keeping them safe, especially from predators. We have predators right here in the city just like ...

Kristina: Of course.

Theresa: They might be different but we still get hawks and things like that so yeah.

Kristina: Of course, yeah. Raccoons.

Theresa: Yeah, raccoons. Oh, that's a big one in the city because they're going through all the trash cans. Yeah. Definitely read up on that and I'm going to have your book in the show notes so people can start there because I thought that was a great resource.

Kristina: Thank you.

Theresa: One of the other things is you are a mom. You have two daughters. What are their ages?

Kristina: They're four and a half and two and a half.

Theresa: Okay, great. I know as a mom myself, I have teenage boys so very different from your daughters.

Kristina: Very different.

Theresa: I know for me, it was really important that my kids understand where their food comes from and so I was just curious. Was that one of your goals as well in this project of being a homesteader?

Kristina: Absolutely, 100%. My husband and I, when we chose to make the move to North Carolina and towards a life of more sustainability in the realm of food, we had our future children in mind and we didn't know what that was going to look like and we didn't have plans beyond the fact that we wanted to be more sustainable and include the future generation. At the time I was working as an art therapist with children. A lot of the children that I worked with, being sheltered in some way, being children of the '90s who maybe spent more time behind the screen instead of outside in the grass or outside in nature and so I was seeing professionally as well this lack of connection between where the egg from the styrofoam container in the fridge came from and making that connection to the chicken that laid it. In our minds, my husband and mine, we were definitely thinking about how our choices were going to impact our children.

Theresa: Yeah. yeah. I think that is something that there has definitely been a shift where more and more people are trying to get their children connected to where their food comes from but I saw the same thing when I was working at the local schools and teaching gardening to some of the children and they had never really understood what a tomato plant looked like or where a tomato came from so, yeah, absolutely. I think it's really, really important. In keeping with that, I know that it's tricky to do the balancing of taking care of your family and taking care of the animals and the garden and everything else. How do you balance your lifestyle with having small children and having homesteading at the same time?

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Kristina: It is a challenge and it's a very good question because I don't know some of the time. It depends on the season and what's so interesting, especially with my children being so little and a lot of homesteading families that are also doing this with small children is that one fall season doesn't look like the next fall season because you may be carrying and nursing one fall season and the next year you've got a toddler who's ready to help you pick blueberries or you're not picking blueberries in the fall but ...

Theresa: I know what you mean, yeah.

Kristina: ... help you pick apples. Because that shifts so much, having children and having a homestead, a very seasonal homestead really forces you to roll with the seasons and be very present in each season and be open and available to what that season may bring. This spring we thought we were going to have bucket loads of peaches and then we got a quick frost and the bees were struggling to pollinate the peaches and it actually significantly reduced our crop and so what that means is when I'm canning them later in the fall, when my children are a little bit older, their participation changes. It impacts the whole rest of the year. Anything that happens in one season impacts the other season.

The balance really comes with starting with a good partnership and a good team. My husband and I are both in the homesteading world together. We agreed early on that it was something that both of us wanted even though I sort of led the charge a little bit. He's fully onboard and so that support means a lot of really good communication between the two of us and teaming up to split the duties.

That might mean, while I have a small baby who requires nursing every 90 minutes, that means he's doing more of the outside chores, the heavy lifting, so to speak, not necessarily physically but the heavy lifting on the homestead where I might be holding down the fort in the home which falls into some pretty typical gender stereotypes, too, but at the same time, there's a necessity there when I'm nursing a baby at the breast instead of at a bottle. Some homesteading families are able to switch that around a little bit and the other partner can feed the baby and the mother can go out and stretch her legs and actually move her body, which is really important in the months and really years after giving birth.

It's really a balance. It requires good communication, willing partners that are both onboard with the homesteading activities and feeling confident that you will be able to get out to everything that needs to be done.

Theresa: Yeah. A partnership is so important and without that, it can be done but it's a lot bigger struggle. With that, there are struggles with homesteading. Here in the city, I don't have nearly the ups and downs because I have such a small piece of property but when you have larger piece of property like you do and you're having more animals to care for, I know that there's ups and downs with every season like you're talking about. Has there been anything that has really been the biggest surprise to you that was more difficult than you expected?

Kristina: I think this might be a little off topic but motherhood ended up being more difficult than I expected.

Theresa: No, I get that. Yeah.

Kristina: As far as homesteading goes, I think I expected the ups and downs. When you first get started with homesteading, it's easy to get excited about all of the new things that you can add, the new animals you bring on, the chicks, the baby bunnies, everything is young and fresh and new. I think it's easy to forget that there's a natural cycle to everything and for a while you're chugging along and just enjoying it. Your chicks are young. They grow into pullets. They're laying well. You maybe have some run-ins with a predator but nothing serious so there's a lot of acquisition in the beginning which feels really great and you build up momentum.

As your birds age, as your rabbits age, as you move through the season and see your honeybee hives come and go and die, which is natural unfortunately in this day and age of beekeeping, I think it's important to remember that that is part of the process and I think that really distinguishes the homesteaders that are in it for the long haul. Once you've reached those milestones and you've seen what it really means to be a homesteader, it takes you to a new level of this process and a true understanding of what this is all about.

Theresa: Yeah. I think the routine of it can be very satisfying but I also love that there's always something new to learn. It's not like you're going to wake up one day and go, "Well, I've learned it all ... "

Kristina: Absolutely not.

Theresa: " ... so I'm good now." Yeah. I'm a lifelong learner and I know my listeners are lifelong learners. That's why they listen to podcasts and read books and so I think that that, to me, is what makes homesteading so fun is there's always some new thing that you hear somebody, "Oh, they're making cider. I want to learn how to do that." That makes it good.

Kristina: Yes and homesteading, it's so important to surround yourself with a community of like-minded families and individuals and groups because early on my husband and I thought we could do it all ourselves. We were striving for 100% sustainability within our unit, within our home and our homestead and it took a little longer maybe than most for us to realize that that's not possible, nor is it the ideal because you can't possibly master all of these skills on your own, even between two people. It's really important to have a community where you can share the skills and everybody has their expertise or their area or something even that they're drawn to. You might not be drawn to everything. You might love to eat apple butter but not really want to go through the process of making it.

It's nice to have other people, a community, even if it's a virtual community, even if it's a community where you meet once a month and you exchange recipes or exchange ideas or something like that, even if they're not the people that live immediately near you, sharing that mindset and that perspective is really important to really keeping you going and thriving in homesteading.

Theresa: I agree with you so much with that. Just even bouncing ideas of, hey, I'm thinking of doing this and they're like, "OH, I tried that and I did it this way," makes a huge difference.

Kristina: Exactly.

Theresa: Yeah. One of the things I want to back up on that you mentioned, you mentioned your bees and I noticed when I was reading all your articles how many bee articles you had and then from talking with you, I found out that you also have a Facebook group. I think it's called the Humble Honeybee, is that what it's-

Kristina: Yes. Correct.

Theresa: Yeah. I love that name. I think that was cute.

Kristina: Thank you.

Theresa: I wanted to talk about beekeeping for a minute. How did you get into beekeeping?

Kristina: That's a good question, too. My husband has an autoimmune disorder that he was diagnosed with when he was quite young and it took a long time, many years of trial and error to find a diet that supported him and that he was able to feel good in and gain weight and feel healthy. What we learned along the way was that processed cane sugar, refined cane sugar was one of his major gastrointestinal triggers. It was a really powerful food in that it could really make the difference between him being able to eat and not. What we learned was that there are other sweeteners that are less processed and this is very early on in our journey. It's understood now that cane sugar is kind of pretty terrible, really terrible for you and that there are better alternatives and some people turn to stevia and agave and it's important to do what works best for you but we wanted a source of chemical-free organic honey that we knew was not processed, that it wasn't transferred overseas or didn't come from overseas, that it wasn't adulterated or cut with corn syrup.

When it comes to food, it's really important to not just read labels but almost be a bit of a detective because there's so much adulteration that is happening to American foods that we really can't be too careful. This was an important thing that we wanted to take into our own hands and at the time I had a wonderful homesteading friend who encouraged me to get into bees and said that I would love it and she was absolutely right. That winter, after moving to North Carolina, we enrolled in a beekeeping class called Bee School and we joined the local-

Theresa: That's a great name.

Kristina: They call it Bee School around here. That's what it is. Is it for the bees or the people? We don't know. I think it's for both but we joined Bee School. We attended and, again, this is before we had kids so we had Tuesday evenings free and we joined the local beekeeping club through our local county extension office which is a resource that I recommend to a lot of people who are interested in keeping bees or especially gardening in their specific regions since beekeeping and gardening are both so very geographically specific. You could live 10 miles from your extension office and still have a completely different microclimate, which is going to affect how your bees live and thrive.

We decided to get into keeping bees and as we learned more about bees and honeybees and their struggles at the moment in our lifetime, we learned that we were going to be doing beekeeping more for them than for us ultimately and one hive would produce more than enough honey for us, even though we consume quite a bit of honey as a family. It really became apparent to us that we needed to keep bees both for the bees and for us. It was a mutually beneficial relationship for us to keep bees.

Theresa: Wow. I love that. I love that you did that. It's something I've always been interested in. I find bees so absolutely fascinating and-

Kristina: Oh yeah.

Theresa: Yeah. Before we started recording we were talking about your bees so I want you to tell everybody, because there are, like when we were talking about ups and downs, what happened with your bees recently?

Kristina: Yes. It would seem like a small rookie mistake. We have lost bees to colony collapse disorder. We've lost bees to not having a queen, so the queen is really critical. She is the crux, the cornerstone of the hive. Without her the hive doesn't live longer than the lifespan of an individual bee. She is responsible for laying all of the eggs and rearing the new generation. In the middle of the summer, a honeybee lives maybe only four to six weeks because she is working so hard collecting nectar and pollen, resin and water for the hive that she literally works herself to death. That's how honeybees, that's how their cycle goes.

We usually go into the winter with a couple of hives of bees at least and this year we had a small hive beetle infestation after a particularly wet and rainy chunk of time and they got the better of the bees and the bees absconded, which means they left the hive. Because we live on the edge of a national forest, they have ample opportunities for finding new homes but it doesn't necessarily mean that they would survive the winter so it was a bit of a loss for us this fall and that's just the reality of homesteading and keeping bees.

In the beginning of keeping bees, I had a mentor who was phenomenal and we were inspecting a hive together and he asked me to do something and I was being very careful not to crush a bee and he looked at me and he said, "Kristina, you're going to crush bees," and I said, "No, I'm never going to crush a bee. I can't imagine moving and squishing one with my arm or moving a super and accidentally squishing a bee," and it happens. It does happen. There are losses and sometimes there are losses because a bee stings you because you might have done something that they weren't happy with. Usually when a bee stings you, they're letting you know something and it's usually your fault if a bee stings you. It's not their fault. They're doing exactly what they should be doing which is defending their hive and their brood.

What I learned was that was a small moment of learning that death is an inevitable part of homesteading but also to remember that the bees are a really wonderful example of a whole collective unit that any one given bee, she's not taking her role individually. She is working on behalf of a greater entity and there are some beekeepers that may name their hives and you think, "Oh, that's silly. It's just a box with 60,000 bees inside," but a hive, an entire colony will have its own personality. Those bees collectively make a personality and so while it's important to respect every individual life, and there are many of them in a honeybee hive, it's also important to remember that there's a collective, that they are all working together and to respect them as a whole as well.

Theresa: Yeah. Wow. You've said so much there that I'd love to dive into but-

Kristina: I hope that's okay.

Theresa: Yeah, no, no. It's totally okay. I love it. I'm really fascinated by bees for all the reasons that you just mentioned and the fact that life and death happen on a homestead I think is very important reason why so many of us want to be connected to our food. It's not just a package or a jar that's in a store. We know where it came from and what's in it and what's not in it and ...

Kristina: Absolutely.

Theresa: ... that's so, so important.

Kristina: It is.

Theresa: Now that you don't have your bees, are you just planning on starting up again in the springtime?

Kristina: Yes, we'll start up again in the spring. It gets easier every year that we have a setback because now we just understand that that's part of it. We will probably start with a nucleus colony, which is called a nuke for short. It's a small colony of about 10,000 bees that have an established queen. She's laying eggs. They have brood in various stages so that when you get your nucleus colony, it's just a mini colony of bees and then you install them into your wooden ware and you give them some time to get started.

With new bees in the spring, whether it's a package of bees which is just the live bees and their queen, no brood or comb, no wax or honey or anything, no matter you start with, if you're starting with a new hive you're probably not going to get honey that year. You just understand that you're working about 18 months out. You're looking at the bigger picture and so we'll start again in the spring and every failure is an opportunity to learn from your mistakes. We will watch out for rainy weather. We'll take the small hive beetle a little more seriously and we'll persist. That's what you do.

Theresa: Yep. Absolutely, that's what you do and you love what you're saying that you're always looking at the bigger picture. I think that's true with so much of what we do. One of the things I wanted to ask you, since you have your group and I know you have so many new beekeepers coming into your Facebook group and to reading some of the articles that you're writing, what would you recommend if someone's listening to this and they're thinking, "I think I want to get into beekeeping," where would you send them to start?

Kristina: That's a great question. I'm not quite a millennial. I'm 34 and so I think I fall in the zennial generation but I prefer to hold a paper book. I like to read books before I go to sleep. I like to read books on the couch. I like to not have a screen in front of me and what I've found with beekeeping information, in fact, is that a lot of what you're seeing online is opinion. Sometimes even the articles I post in the Humble Honeybee are opinion and I ask for others' opinions and we create a community by having a discussion about potentially contentious issues such as the flow hive. I'm not sure if you saw about that a couple years ago.

Theresa: Oh yeah. Yes, I did. Yeah.

Kristina: There was a buzz about that and so it's really important to have a community and have those discussions but when you're a brand new beekeeper, when you're a new bee, as we like to call because we're all bee nerds, I think it's really important to get started with some good books. I love Kim Flottum's books. Let me see if I can pull up one of the books. Kim Flottum's "The Backyard Beekeeper". He has a couple of editions now. I've interviewed him for several of my beekeeping columns over the years back when they were in print and I think he's got some really good solid advice for beginners who are really just getting started. There are so many beekeeping books now.

Another book that I love is by Ross Conrad, basically anything by Ross Conrad. He's an organic and natural beekeeper. His book "Natural Beekeeping: Organic Approaches to Modern Apiculture" is really wonderful. That might be the second book I recommend a beekeeper read just because he talks about some techniques that might require a little bit of knowledge to understand what he's saying.

After reading some books and getting your feet wet and seeing if this is the direction you want to go, I would recommend reaching out to your local county extension office and seeing if there are any beekeeping clubs in your area. Back when we started in 2009, I think we went through Meetup.com. Facebook, again, Instagram. There are many social media platforms where you can find like-minded and fellow beekeepers in your area. Then you might want to reach out to some of those people, see if you can call them up on the phone or email them and talk to them and see what beekeeping is like in your area.

Something that is maybe unconventional advice that other people might not think about is to consult your doctor and visit your allergist before committing and putting down any money towards beekeeping. If you've ever been stung by a honeybee, you might know if you're allergic or not. When I got started, I didn't know if I was allergic or not to honeybees because I had never been stung by one. Honeybee venom is different from wasp or yellow jacket venom so you may be allergic to one but not the other. That's really important to discuss with your doctor and your allergist. There are some ways to keep bees if you're allergic but that's, again, an individual decision. I would recommend covering all your bases there before you buy any bees or equipment. I think that's a wonderful place to start, reading books, learning from other beekeepers, talking to other beekeepers.

Theresa: I think that's a great place to start but I really like the idea of getting checked with an allergist. That's super important and something people probably don't normally think to do but it would be really horrible if you found out after you've invested all this time and money and you don't want anything bad to happen with the bees. You'd have to find a home for the bees if you've started this and then discover that you're horrible allergic. That would not be fun.

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- Kristina: It should be said that having a honeybee hive in close proximity to a home doesn't necessarily increase your chances of getting stung. Some people are concerned about their neighbors who may balk at the idea of having a honeybee hive nextdoor. Honeybees will not be anymore aggressive with close proximity. It's all about how they're managed and handled. On that note, you also might want to consult with your neighbors, especially if you live in a home owner's association and there are regulations where you live. You'll have to consult your association to make sure that they allow keeping bees.
- Theresa: Yes, absolutely it's just like with chickens. You kind of have to check what your individual regulations are. I know in my town, you are allowed to have bees but you have to get certified and licensed by the fire department.
- Kristina: Oh, wow.
- Theresa: Yeah, the fire marshal comes out and makes sure that where you want to place it, so it's not crossing the sidewalk to get to its water source.
- Kristina: Interesting.
- Theresa: Yeah, I thought that was interesting, too. I was like, "Really?"
- Kristina: That's very thorough.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Kristina: Yeah.
- Theresa: I thought that was good. At least they don't say, "No, you can't have them." They just want to kind of check you out before you start bringing them in.
- Kristina: That's wonderful.
- Theresa: Yeah, which is-
- Kristina: That's great

- Theresa: Yeah, I think that's good and I think that's totally fair and then that way the neighbors can not be worried about it. Yeah. Kristina, I really want to thank you for coming on and sharing so much information about what you're doing and how you're doing it. I really appreciate it.
- Kristina: Of course.
- Theresa: I think that so many people kind of wonder how big they can get and really with homesteading, you kind of just grow into it and that's definitely what you've done so thank you for coming on and sharing all your information today.
- Kristina: Oh, Theresa, thank you so much. This was a lot of fun. Thank you.
- Theresa: I hope you enjoyed that interview with Kristina Mercedes Urquhart, the author of "The Suburban Chicken". As always, I will have in the show notes for this episode everything that we talk about, the books that Kristina recommends, links to some of her articles and I will also link to some of the information I have on my website on backyard beekeeping. I'm also going to link to an article that she just wrote recently that's all about proper honey storage. I thought it was really, really good so I will link to that in the show notes as well.
- To get to the show notes, just go to [LivingHomegrown.com/135](http://LivingHomegrown.com/135). I hope you enjoyed that interview with Kristina. I know I did and I'm definitely going to be adding some more homesteaders sprinkled throughout our podcast lineup as we go forward. Until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal and homegrown. Take care.
- Announcer: That's all for this episode of the "Living Homegrown" podcast. Visit [LivingHomegrown.com](http://LivingHomegrown.com) to download Theresa's free canning resource guide and find more tips on how to live farm fresh without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the "Living Homegrown" podcast.
- Theresa: Yeah, thank you for doing this. I really appreciate it because I know it was a little tricky. We had to finagle the husband to take care of the girls.
- Kristina: Absolutely. It's always about finagling the husband.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Kristina: Just kidding.



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Theresa: That's really what homesteading's all about.

Kristina: I should've put that in the interview. That's the number one. Finagle your husband and then you can go from there. Anything's possible.

Theresa: Totally. That is the truth.